Mapping the official discourse of frugality in China between 1979 and 2015

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine how the official discourse of frugality evolved in China between 1979 and 2015.


Findings – A Chinese official discourse on frugality persisted between 1979 and 2015, even though during the same period, China transformed from a socialist economy of central planning and insufficient supply to a market economy of excessive supply and weak consumer demand. The intensity of this official discourse frequently vacillated, adjusting to both economic and political conditions of the time as part of the larger political-economic contestation between competing ideas and policies.

Originality/value – There have been calls for more studies on how frugality discourses have evolved in international markets, especially in terms of how they are shaped by local historical antecedents and long-standing tensions. Through the Chinese case, this article illuminates why some traditional values persist and obtain a paradoxical co-existence with consumerist ethos in our modern society.

Keywords China, Anti-consumption, Frugality, Official discourse

The Western model of development based on excessive consumption has produced catastrophic environmental effects. To advocate environmentalism and achieve sustainability, Princen et al. (2002) argue that we need to confront overconsumption as a serious systemic problem and resurrect seemingly outmoded concepts such as frugality, self-reliance, simplicity and stewardship.

A central theme of the world’s major religions and philosophies, frugality is invariably embedded in the discourse of morality and is linked to self-control and spirituality, while conspicuous consumption signifies corruption and decadence (Horowitz, 1992; Shi, 1985). Meanwhile, often grouped with virtues such as hard work and personal contentment, the idea of frugality has historically functioned as an instrument of social control to maintain class distinctions and to preserve social stability (Shi, 1985). Yet, today, it also represents a rebellion against consumerism and overconsumption (Witkowski, 2010).

The history of frugality discourses in the USA has received considerable scholarly attention (Cohen, 2006; Horowitz, 1992; Shi, 1985; Tucker, 1991; Witkowski, 2003, 2010). The US discourses have been shaped by the country’s unique religious, political and social landscape (Witkowski, 2010). Indeed, the USA is an exception in that the US Government rarely got involved in promoting frugality, except for during the First and Second World Wars (Horioka, 2006; Tucker, 1991); in contrast, many Asian
governments actively promoted frugality as an integral part of their political programs (Garon, 2006; Nelson, 2006). Given the many religious, political and social differences among countries, Witkowski (2010) advocates the need to conduct more studies on how frugality discourses have evolved in other countries, especially in terms of how they are shaped by local historical antecedents and long-standing tensions.

As an effort to enrich the literature on the development of international frugality discourses, this article examines how the official discourse of frugality evolved in China between 1979 and 2015. China presents an interesting case not only because of its long and unique cultural history but also because of its complex economic and political landscape: it transformed within a few decades from a poor, isolated socialist country with insufficient supply of consumer goods and wide-spread rationing of daily necessities into the world’s second largest economy and one of the fastest-growing consumer markets. Such a miraculous transformation has been closely managed by the central government and enabled by constant policy adjustments. This article argues that the Chinese official discourse of frugality served as a policy tool of the state over the years and underwent significant changes and expansions in its repertoire of ideas because of China’s ever-evolving political ideology, economic conditions and social tensions.

The historical background

The ideology of frugality has a long history in China. Confucius, whose idea system served as the dominant Chinese ideology for hundreds of years, emphasizes the importance of proper ceremonies, yet considers it better to err on the side of frugality than on the side of extravagance (Chong, 2007). An ideal Confucian gentleman:

[...] revealed his goodness in his love of beauty, which was expressed in unfailing good taste and freedom from ostentation. He preferred uprightness in a frugal life to a preoccupation with wealth (Meskill, 1994, p. 70).

Other Chinese native philosophies such as Taoism and realism take a step further in advocating frugality and simple living, condemning material luxuries and artisans who produce luxuries as false and corruptive (Waley, 1963). Though an imported religion, Buddhism, with its austere ideal of renouncing the world of things, has also left its mark on Chinese material culture (Kieschnick, 2003). On the other hand, elites and officials in ancient China led the way in conspicuous consumption, and complex sumptuary laws were enforced to maintain class distinctions (Brook, 1999; Meskill, 1994). Meanwhile, conspicuous display of wealth easily led to charges of corruption and severe punishment by the emperor (Clunas, 2004).

The Nationalist Government during the Republic period launched its discourse of frugality, especially through its New Life Movement in the 1930s. The regime gradually adopted socialist policies that disparaged commerce and promoted national modernization and development through central planning (Tang and Parish, 2000). Emphasizing the idea that China’s economy was characterized by scarcity rather than abundance, Chinese elites questioned the wisdom of adopting Western-style consumerist habits and promoted forms of frugal modernity (Zanasi, 2015).

In its struggle to survive and defeat the Nationalist Government, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had to work with limited resources under difficult conditions. For this reason, diligence and frugality became a key element of its political ideology to mobilize its foot soldiers ever since its early years. After the founding of the People’s Republic, the CCP launched its programs of industrialization and guided capital investment toward heavy
industry at the expense of agriculture and light industry. To restrain consumer demand, personal income growth was kept low, daily necessities were rationed and dispensable consumer goods were priced high (Naughton, 2007). In this context, wastefulness was treated as a trait of the exploitative classes and severely condemned (Party Literature Research Center of the CCP, 2016). Constantly promoted by the regime’s relentless propaganda system, frugality became a prevalent ideology governing social life in Mao’s China.

China embarked on a path of economic reform and liberalization in 1979, and the Chinese economy experienced rapid development in the subsequent four decades. Meanwhile, the country was combating a set of perennial social problems, including corruption, pollution and widening income gaps, which challenge the regime’s legitimacy. Shambaugh (2016) remarks that the relationship between economics and politics offers the key to understanding China and its perplexing phenomena. Still an authoritarian regime, the Chinese Government continues to play a hegemonic role in the political, economic and social arenas so that its discourses dominate and shape social discussions and debates. In such a context, some interesting questions arise: how did the official discourse of frugality evolve since 1979 in its adjustment to China’s evolving economic and political landscape? In particular, how did its repertoire of ideas evolve over time? The rest of the article will report findings of its historical analysis.

Method
This project used historical research and analysis as its primary method. Primary data consist of articles on the subject of frugality from The People’s Daily (renmin ribao) between 1979 and 2015. The People’s Daily serves as the mouthpiece of the CCP; its editorials and commentaries are written by the Chinese leadership and political elites, its content directly censored and approved by the Central Committee of the CCP and its editorials are frequently reprinted or re-broadcast by other mass media outlets and used as required materials of mandatory political studies at work units nation-wide (Wu, 1994). Hence, given its hegemonic nature, the newspaper serves as an appropriate data source of the Chinese official discourse on frugality.

The People’s Daily’s online searchable database was used to collect articles. Given that the ideology of frugality is not monolithic but embracing many dimensions and ideas, the Chinese synonyms and antonyms of frugality were used as the search words, including jieyue (frugality), jiejian (thrifty), langfei (wasteful), shechi (decadent) and fubai (corrupted); words such as xiaofei (consumption) and xiaofei zhuyi (consumerism) were also used to search articles on the topic of consumption in general. The data also include key speeches by Chinese senior leaders and relevant policy documents, directives, circulars and regulations issued by the central government: these data were collected from the websites of the Chinese Government bodies. In addition, secondary data, consisting of Chinese macro-economic statistics published by international organizations, as well as English books and articles by Western scholars and journalists on Chinese politics, economy, and social development since 1979, were used to understand the historical context.

Periodization is an integral part of historical research and offers several advantages over simple chronology, including providing a better structure and making comparisons between periods possible (Hollander et al., 2005). This project divided the Chinese official discourse on frugality between 1979 and 2015 into four periods: 1979-1992, 1993-2002, 2003-2012 and 2013-2015. One reason for this periodization is that each period represents an administration with one dominant leader: Zhao Ziyang for 1979-1992, Jiang Zemin for 1993-2002, Hu Jingtao for 2003-2012 and Xi Jinping, the current
president of the country, for 2013-2015. Though Zhao Ziyang’s tenure – first as the premier from 1980 to 1987 and then as the first party secretary until 1989 – only spanned between 1980 and 1989, historians treat the period between 1979 and 1992 as one broader block. A more important reason for such periodization is that the four periods roughly correspond to the major stages of China’s economic development: 1979 marked the start of China’s economic reform, even though China remained an economy of central planning between 1979 and 1992; in 1992, the Communist regime gave its full endorsement to the development of “a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics” so that the period between 1993 and 2002 saw the market gradually replacing central planning in the various sectors of the Chinese economy; after China officially joined the World Trade Organization in 2001, the period between 2003 and 2012 witnessed China’s full integration into the global trade system; since 2013, China has entered an era of a slowing economy, which exposes the many fundamental problems of the system (Gough, 2016). In this light, the periodization scheme adopted here is both appropriate and productive for mapping the development of the official frugality discourse in China since 1979.

**Frugality and the primary stage of socialism: the period of 1979-1992**

The year 1979 saw the Chinese Government introduce a series of economic reforms to tackle the problems of insufficient consumer goods supply, low consumption and high unemployment (Riskin, 1987). To promote policies that encouraged some people to become rich first, a front-page editorial in *The People’s Daily* differentiated socialist production from capitalist production: the former was not driven by exploiting workers for surplus value but aimed to satisfy the material and cultural needs of the entire society so that consumption was part of production (*The People’s Daily, 1979a*). The article identified the mistakes of China’s economic development during the Mao period as putting too much emphasis on heavy industry while ignoring agriculture and light industry, which led to severe imbalances between supply and demand.

The regime launched an “Increase Production, Reduce Waste (*zengchan jieyue*)” campaign in 1979 in coordination with its modernization drive, whose goal was to change China’s economic and technological backwardness. During the campaign, bureaucracy was pinpointed as the hotbed of wastefulness (Yu, 1979). Promoting the slogan, “thrift is honorable, wastefulness is shameful, embezzlement is criminal (*jieyue guangrong, langfei kechi, tanwu youzui*),” the campaign saw waste reduction as a means to improving production efficiency. The frugality discourse in 1979 was also linked to the anti-corruption discourse. For example, editorials in *The People’s Daily* (1979b, 1979c) singled out extravagance as one symptom of corruption in the daily practices of public institutions and warned that only the decadent exploitative classes took pleasure in extravagant life.

As inflation and budget deficit rose sharply in 1980 (Keidel, 2007), the Chinese Government retreated from its reform agenda in the early 1980s. As a result, the official discourse on frugality took on a more earnest tone. An editorial in *The People’s Daily* in February 1980 called on all public institutions to practice “diligence and frugality” (*The People’s Daily, 1980*). The article suggested that struggling and improvising under difficult conditions (*jianku fendou*) was a valuable tradition of the CCP and should continue to govern China’s economic development. Echoing this editorial, some articles criticized extravagant practices such as high-cost weddings, some advocated simple, frugal life or low-cost group weddings and some reported on role models who rejected extravagant lifestyles; there was even a call for an anti-wastefulness law. Practices of
waste reduction by local institutions frequented the newspaper. Interestingly, farmers were often singled out as examples of wasting energy or irrational consumption.

A root cause for the strengthened frugality discourse in the early 1980s was rising corruption among government officials. In July 1981, the central government issued Circular on Firmly Rectifying Bribery, Nepotism, and Fraudulence Among Government Officials (The Central Committee of the CCP, 1981). In January 1982, it issued An Emergency Circular on Combating Economic Crimes (The Central Committee of the CCP, 1982). The CCP launched the Anti-Spiritual Pollution campaign in 1983 to attack the perceived bourgeois influences in society (Kluver, 1996). In December 1983, the disciplinary arm of the central government demanded that public institutions stop the practices of spending public funds on feasts and gifts.

The frugality discourse in the early 1980s targeted the Western consumption model. Admitting that individuals were free to make their own consumption decisions, Yu (1981) raised the question: should China pursue Western societies’ current consumption model, which was very wasteful, or develop a less wasteful model? Warning against “premature consumption,” Li (1983) criticized some Chinese for spending beyond their means.

Yet, as the Chinese regime advanced its reform agenda in 1984, some explicit anti-frugality rhetoric emerged in The People’s Daily. For example, giving Chinese farmers’ rapidly rising income, Sima (1984) argued that farmers were used to diligence and frugality and easily felt content with a simple life, and therefore should be taught on how to spend their money to improve their living standards. In contrast, farmers who spent thousands on banquets in luxury hotels were praised (Shao, 1984). Advocated by the media, the slogan “able to earn, able to spend” (nengzheng huihua) became the new standard for modern Chinese. One article even used the term “country pumpkin” (tu laocai) to describe people who had money but did not know how to spend it (Wu, 1984).

An editorial in the newspaper even condemned the previous CCP efforts of promoting frugality (The People’s Daily, 1984).

Industrial overheating and rising inflation in 1984 forced the regime to pick up its frugality discourse in 1985 and 1986. In fact, the media took a sharp turn away from its pro-consumption discourse in early 1985: in late January and early February, The People’s Daily was still publishing pro-consumption articles, yet in March, it criticized the Chinese media for promoting the “able to earn, able to spend” mentality and for downplaying frugality as an outdated value (Lu, 1985). Zhao Ziyang, the premier at the time, emphasized in a speech that while China would gradually improve its people’s living standards, diligence and frugality should be the fundamental principles of China’s long-term development (The People’s Daily, 1985a). Blaming the media for fueling people’s unrealistic consumption desires, a front-page editorial in argued that it was not desirable to have high income and high consumption.

The year 1987 started with an Anti-Bourgeois Liberalization political campaign in China, which targeted liberal intellectuals. In his annual report to the People’s Congress, Premier Zhao (1987a) observed that consumption demand was growing too fast, which led to lower capital accumulation, declining morality and rising hedonism; he reiterated that diligence and frugality should be the governing principles of China’s development. Given the economic situation, the regime formally put forward the theory of “the primary stage of socialism” (shehuizhuyi chuji jieduan), which posited that Chinese socialism was characterized by an imbalanced economy and low levels of development (Zhao, 1987b). Though economic reforms resumed between 1987 and 1988, high inflation and worsening corruption meant that these reforms were accompanied by an intensified discourse of
frugality. The disciplinary arm of the CCP demanded in April 1987 that public institutions immediately stop spending public funds on feasts and gifts (The People's Daily, 1987a). An editorial in The People's Daily in May 1987 urged government officials to stay away from wasting and embezzling public funds so as to protect the image of the CCP (The People's Daily, 1987b). In February 1988, the State Council convened an emergency meeting, which decided to cut public spending by 20 per cent and called upon government officials to become role models of honesty and frugality (Yuan, 1988). To further control institutional spending and curb inflation, the government banned public institutions from purchasing 29 categories of goods, including cars, furniture, electronics, watches, clothing and liquor and tobacco products (The People's Daily, 1988).

The frugality discourse also targeted the general population. Rather than extolling consumption as the catalyst of production growth, articles in 1987 and 1988 focused on high consumption as a burden on economic reforms and sounded the alarm of premature, irrational, competitive consumer spending. In this context, even soft drinks and double-door refrigerators were considered too wasteful of resources, and there were calls to limit their marketing. The fate of yuppies in the West during the 1987 economic recession was cited to teach the Chinese that a spendthrift, hedonistic lifestyle could not last (Li, 1988). Adopting a global view, Wu (1988) suggested that the earth had the capacity to sustain at most 11 billion people with a healthy, well-fed but not extravagant life.

Inflation reached more than 18 per cent in 1988 and 1989 (World Bank, 2016), causing panic buying by the Chinese. High inflation, rising income gaps, epidemic corruption and hovering uncertainty about the future became the fuse that touched off mass demonstrations in Spring 1989. Hardliners took control of the government between 1989 and 1991 and adopted measures to roll back the economic reforms. Consequently, the three years, known as “the rectification period,” was marked by economic austerity, resumed emphasis on planning and price control and reassertion of the Party’s authority in many formerly liberalized areas (Shambaugh, 2016).

During the second half of 1989, the official frugality discourse intensified as part of the regime’s rectification campaign. Wu (1989), the president of Peking University, published an article on the front page of The People’s Daily, criticizing the mentality of money worship, extravagance, high consumption and egotism that bred corruption in the society. A number of articles attacked competitive spending by various social groups. Western experiences were borrowed to educate the Chinese about the negatives of excessive consumption (Qiu, 1989; Shi, 1989). There were also discussions on how to control consumer demand by stimulating household savings, issuing stocks and bonds and commercializing the urban housing sector. Some articles tackled consumer psychology. For example, Wang (1989a) promoted a new image of Chinese males, who not only diligently shared housework but also knew how to live a frugal life. Wang (1989b) suggested that emulating other people's consumption habits was a vain, vulgar behavior.

The official frugality discourse continued between 1990 and 1992, which frequently resorted to ancient intellectuals, contemporary revolutionaries, overseas Chinese and Westerners as role models of frugality. Given the conservative political climate of the time, consumerism was grouped together with liberalism, egotism, hedonism and capitalism as tools used by the West to undermine Chinese socialism (Kang, 1991). However, there was also a distinct, parallel discourse calling for more consumption. Walking a fine line, some experts promoted the idea of “moderate consumption” (shidu xiaofei) as a middle road between encouraging high consumption and restricting consumption (Zhang, 1991). Wu and Lu (1992), two Chinese scientists, proposed that China should develop an energy-efficient economic system instead of the Western model based on high consumption and high energy.
usage, and they argued that the Chinese should live a more sustainable life consisting of a vegetable-based diet, smaller houses and public transportation.

Overall, the period of 1979-1992 in China was characterized by abrupt shifts in economic and political policies: the reform agenda advanced in 1979, 1984 and 1987-88 but retreated in other years because of inflationary pressure and ideological struggles within the party (Naughton, 2007). More importantly, central planning, price control, insufficient supply and rationing largely characterized the Chinese economy at the time. Meanwhile, corruption became a widespread and perennial problem. In this context, the Chinese official frugality discourse during the period reflected the dramatic shifts in the regime’s economic and political policies and served as one of its tools to achieve its anti-inflation, anti-corruption agendas. As the leftist mentality of class and class struggle gradually receded from Chinese politics, the discourse became more inclusive, increasingly turning to both Chinese history and Western experiences for evidence and support. The rationale for frugality slowly diversified over time, encompassing economic, moral and environmental dimensions, though socialist political rhetoric continued to dominate. As the period ended in turmoil followed by political conservatism, it set the tone for Chinese politics, as well as the discourse on frugality for the next decade.

**Frugality and the socialist market economy: the period of 1993-2003**

China formally embraced a market economy in the 1990s and launched reforms that targeted state-owned enterprises and its socialist welfare system, including housing, education and health care. The Chinese economy boomed between 1993 and 1994, which, again, led to soaring inflation. Politically, the Chinese Government promoted socialist spiritual civilization as an essential characteristic of Chinese socialism. Hence, while committed to a “socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics,” it orchestrated a frugality discourse between 1993 and 1996.

In early 1993, Jiang (1993) proposed a 64-word motto to capture the entrepreneurial spirit of contemporary China, which included the principles of diligence, frugality, integrity and honesty. An editorial in *The People’s Daily* (1993a) on March 6 clarified that encouraging consumption and maintaining the tradition of diligence and frugality were not contradictory because diligence and frugality were a spiritual inheritance of Chinese culture and thus still relevant to China’s efforts to construct a strong socialist market economy. Feng (1994) argued that people should not confuse the wasteful habits in developed countries with modernization, the former being the cancer of modern society. Commenting on the resurgence of frugality around the world, Yan (1994) concluded that diligence and frugality should be treated as a moral principle or even a faith and would not become outdated in a market economy.

There were no major anti-corruption campaigns between 1993 and 1996, even though the central government routinely issued circulars or regulations to curb publicly funded extravagant practices of government officials. Many articles at the time promoted the idea of rational consumption and criticized the irrational consumption practices and marketing practices that stimulated people’s desire for extravagance and status. Zhao and Yuan (1993) categorized irrational household consumption into harmful consumption (such as binge drinking and eating), wasteful consumption (such as buying expensive clothing for kids), bulk buying, splurging and competitive consumption. Farmers’ spending on superstitious rituals, gambling, wedding and funerals were criticized as wasteful and foolish. Children and self-employed were also singled out for their irrational consumption habits. Some articles offered tips to consumers on how to save money in daily life, and new social trends
such as renting instead of buying and “share purchases” – where a group of people bought things together to get discounts – were celebrated as smart consumption.

The ideas of sustainability and environmentalism emerged as an important element in the Chinese frugality discourse. Li (1993), a senior government official, framed economic development and environmental protection as two parallel tasks for China and saw the need for the country to move from a model of high energy consumption and low efficiency to a model emphasizing energy conservation.

Parallel to the frugality discourse, a pro-consumption discourse was constructed to support the marketization of the economy. In January 1993, a front-page article in The People’s Daily (1993b) announced that the third wave of consumption was coming to the country, which involved high-tech electronics, modern housing facilities and personal cars. Ren (1993) proposed that consumer demand should be created and stimulated, and marketers should learn to manufacture new consumption trends. Xiao (1996) believed that China must encourage credit-based consumption to build a modern economy, even though it directly challenged the traditional idea of frugality. Recounting how he borrowed money to buy some expensive electronics, Yang (1996) argued that consumption debts could make a person more frugal. Shi (1995) saw the need to reduce household savings by encouraging more consumption.

To facilitate the pro-consumption rhetoric, some articles attempted to differentiate between normal consumption and consumerism. Cao (1993) suggested that high consumption and decadent consumption were not the same, though decadent consumption was always about consuming expensive luxuries but usually involved wasteful, irrational elements. Similarly, Yin (1996) defined consumerism (xiaofei zhuyi) as a popular idea in Western countries, which pursued conspicuous, decadent consumption as the purpose of life; in contrast, consumption culture (xiaofei wenhua) was a component of social culture and played an important cultural, social and economic role. On the other hand, some Chinese intellectuals became disillusioned with the Western model of development (Zhang, 2008) and began to borrow Western critical theories to critique Chinese consumer culture. For example, equating consumer culture with consumerist culture, Huang (1995) lamented how TV programs and commercials promoted expensive consumer brands as signs of status and pride.

After having prosecuted some high-profile corruption cases in 1996, the CCP launched an anti-corruption campaign in 1997 against institutional wasteful and extravagant practices. Notably, Jiang (1997a) urged the Chinese, as communists and Marxists, to resist the decadent, materialistic, hedonistic lifestyles in the West and to embrace frugality as part of socialist ethics and Chinese traditional values. An editorial on the front page of The People’s Daily (1998) reiterated the principle of diligence and frugality and demanded that people spend as little as possible. However, because of a deflationary economic environment and improving budgetary revenue, much fewer of such articles were published between 1999 and 2001, though the newspaper continued to report on government policies and initiatives to curb corruption. In 2002, there was a new wave of articles condemning extravagance and promoting frugality.

Meanwhile, the Chinese discourse between 1997 and 2002 continued to offer sustainability and environmental protection as a strong rationale for frugality. An article pointed out that environmentalism was based on the ethos of altruism instead of egotism and reflected one’s care about the well-being of others, society and future generations (The People’s Daily, 2001). Wen (2001) remarked that frugality was a way to show respect toward the fruits of human labor and the creation of nature.
In the late 1990s, facing rising housing, education and health care costs, urban Chinese channeled their incomes into savings rather than spending. Meanwhile, farmers were experiencing declining incomes. As a result, China witnessed weak consumer demand, excessive supply and deflation. An article in *The People’s Daily* formally declared that China entered the economic stage of excessive supply (Pi, 1998). Given the macroeconomic situation, the pro-consumption discourse intensified. In calling for expanding internal demand, some articles still paid lip service to the value of frugality, arguing that the two were not contradictory, while others advised that people should spend money whenever necessary or borrow money to realize their dreams. Yan (1999) believed that individuals were entitled to conspicuous consumption as long as they spent their own money rather than public funds. Mu (2000) suggested that marketers should promote indulgent consumption. In exploring the reasons underlying weak consumer demand, Liu (1999), the head of Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences, blamed China’s overemphasis on frugality and saving in the past and government policies and practices that restrained the consumption of energy and water. To promote consumption, the government loosened its credit lending policies, lowered interest rates several times and started to tax interest incomes from savings; it also adopted measures to boost people’s income. Housing, cars, tourism, higher education and health care were promoted as primary ways to stimulate consumption. Ironically, high housing, education and health care costs were also factors that were restraining consumer demand.

In summary, the Chinese economy took a significant step toward marketization during the period of 1993-2002, which also witnessed inflation and shortage of supply in the first two years being replaced by deflation and weak consumer demand in the late 1990s. Chinese politics remained conservative, and corruption continued to run rampant. In fact, in striving to build the so-called socialist spiritual civilization, the CCP intensified its ideological work during the period and re-mobilized propaganda campaigns to defend its legitimacy (Lieberthal, 2003). Notably, there was a revival of neo-Confucianism inspired by the success of China’s East Asian neighbors (Goldman, 1999). Against such a background, the official discourse on frugality elevated the value into a moral principle that was still relevant, even though China had advanced from a poor country to a relatively well-to-do (xiaokang) country. The discourse specifically targeted government officials as part of the regime’s anti-corruption efforts. It also introduced new ideas governing consumer consumption, especially in terms of sustainability and environmental protection. However, weak consumer demand in the late 1990s gave rise to a strong pro-consumption discourse, which directly contradicted the frugality discourse.

**Frugality and a harmonious society: the period of 2003-2012**

The Chinese economy grew at double digits between 2003 and 2007 and slowed down during the second half of the period but still at a fast pace (World Bank, 2016). Similarly, the Chinese Government adopted some political reform measures during the early 2000s, which opened up space for non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including many environmental NGOs (Ford, 2012). However, the regime shifted to a more authoritarian stance after 2008 (Shambaugh, 2016). China’s breakneck economic growth created many social problems and led to escalating social instability. Questioning the country’s single-minded focus on gross domestic product (GDP) growth at the expense of broader social developments, the CCP under Hu Jintao’s leadership put forward the concept of “harmonious society,” which advocated a more inclusive, fair, sustainable, humanistic and balanced model of growth that emphasized the needs of ordinary Chinese. According to The Central Committee of the CCP (2006), a harmonious society should be built upon socialist ethics and
positive traditional Chinese cultural values, including diligence, frugality, anti-hedonism, anti-money worship and anti-egotism. Because of the new policy orientation, the Chinese official discourse on frugality took on an unprecedented intensity during the first half of the Hu administration.

The year 2003 saw a rising number of articles that linked frugality to sustainability and environmental protection. For example, Guo (2003) introduced the Western concept of “environmental footprint” (shengtai zuyin), compared the size of consumer footprint in different countries and argued that the Western model of excessive development and consumption was undesirable and unsustainable. In an interview, Liang Congjie, the founder of the Friends of Nature, an environmental NGO, warned people of the danger of a consumer society and especially an extravagant society (Yang, 2003). Wu (2003) introduced the theory of circular economy and its principles of “reduce, reuse and recycle.” Even articles promoting consumption adopted a moderate tone.

The Chinese Government launched a centrally coordinated, large-scale campaign between 2004 and 2007 to promote the concept of “resource-efficient” (ziyuan jieyue) society. In its instructions on the campaign, the Propaganda Department of the CCP required that:

The media promote exemplary practices and individuals in terms of frugality and resource conservation, expose behaviors and phenomena of wasting resources and polluting the environment, advocate the ethos of “honorable to save and shameful to waste (jieyue guangrong, langfei kechi),” and create public opinions favorable to the development of resource-efficient economic growth, industrial structures, and consumption models. (Zhu, 2005, p. 4)

To implement such an agenda, the regime mobilized its mass media, education and administrative systems to spread the message. The People’s Daily started a new section devoted to the topic. To elicit active involvement in the campaign by ordinary Chinese, tactics such as contests and interactive marketing were used. For example, there was a national TV contest on how to properly use and save electricity in 2004, and a national promotion campaign entitled “Save Together, Act Together (quanmin jieyue, gongtong xingdong)” in 2005 asked Chinese citizens to sign an online pledge to follow Citizens’ Behavioral Guidelines on Frugality (Draft) (Gongmin Jieyue Xingwei Zhunze Cao’an) (The People’s Daily, 2005). The Guidelines offered tips on saving resources in daily life, such as setting the room temperature at 26°C (78.8°F), taking public transportation, using both sides of paper, separating and recycling garbage, putting a brick in the water tank of the toilet to reduce water usage, collecting the used water from washing vegetables to flush the toilet, etc. A poster design competition was held in 2007 to promote the campaign theme (Wang, 2007). Local governments and institutions held their own competitions and contests to implement the campaign.

The four-year campaign to promote a resource-efficient society was based on a realistic assessment of China’s development. Many articles used detailed data to elaborate on China’s resource shortage. Creating a sense of imminent crisis, the campaign also acknowledged the many imbalances and high costs of China’s economic development since 1979 (Gu, 2004). It questioned the Western model of economic development and borrowed from Chinese traditional thoughts to emphasize that harmony between nature and humans is a key measurement of economic success (Ren, 2007). In promoting sustainable development, the campaign not only appealed to Chinese nationalism but also projected the Chinese as responsible members of the human race, who were willing to contribute to the fight against global warming by reducing personal consumption. Some of the writings were very sentimental. For example, in a front-page editorial to summarize the gist of the campaign, Ren (2007, p. 1) wrote:
We have bidden farewell to poverty and backwardness and started to live a modern life. Only now do we realize that our mountains and rivers look tired and the earth is crying. Our needs are constantly met, but we have paid prices and mortgaged our future. Developing a resource-efficient society and loving Mother Earth require us to take good care of the land under our feet and the future of our human race. Resource conservation is not only our voluntary choice in building a modern China but also an inevitable choice for us in facing the world and the future.

During the campaign, the government continued to claim frugality as a key component of socialist ethics. For example, Hu (2006) proposed “Eight Honors and Eight Shames” (barong bachi) of socialist codes of honor, which included frugality as an honor and extravagance as a shame. Meanwhile, to broaden its appeal, frugality was also promoted as a modern, positive, trendy, healthy lifestyle that was embraced by people around the globe. Discussing the joy of practicing frugality, Wang (2005b) attributed it to the fact that frugality gave people opportunities to be creative, resourceful and productive, which in turn led to a sense of achievement. Zeng et al. (2007) posited that in modern society, people pursued simplicity because living a simple, elegant, healthy life required intelligence and cultural capital, while competitive spending was the vulgar practice of the new rich. Many articles cited how people in advanced economies practiced frugality to shame the Chinese and to convince them that frugality was a global trend.

The campaign promoted some CCP leaders such as Deng Xiaoping and Mao Zedong as role models of frugality. It also created new models. For example, Deng Chenggui, a scientist and CCP member, was praised for his devotion to his country and also for his frugal lifestyle: he would split one piece of facial tissue into three parts and use one part at one time (Liu and Song, 2005). The targets of criticism included daily wasteful practices and also specific groups of people, such as college students and the rich. In 2005, students from Beijing universities were organized to rank the most wasteful phenomena on their campus (Dong, 2005). Interestingly, criticism was also aimed at government policies and projects that were unfeasible, repetitive and extravagant (Liu, 2005). Marketers were criticized for constantly enticing people to replace their still-functioning old models. An excessive, extravagant consumer culture was blamed for China’s environmental problems and for contributing to social polarization and disharmony.

Between 2004 and 2007, a pro-consumption discourse continued but was much subdued in its tone. More importantly, excessive consumption (guodu xiaofei) was attacked as unsustainable and unscientific, and consumers were advised to practice appropriate consumption: always consider the consequences of one’s consumption on other people, society and the environment (Wang, 2005a). Consumers were also encouraged to purchase energy-efficient, environmentally friendly products (Pan, 2007; Sun, 2007). Some articles challenged China’s economic growth model based on urbanization and promotion of big houses and personal cars. The leader of a Beijing-based environmental NGO outlined the environmental impact if every Chinese household had access to a large house, a car, air-conditioning, daily showers and luxury products, roads and parking space for cars alone would take up half of China’s arable land (Wang, 2005c). Wei (2006), a university professor, advised people to measure wealth not only by material acquisition but also by the amount of free time at one’s disposal.

Chinese Central and Local Governments adopted some administrative measures between 2004 and 2007 to reduce waste and restrain the consumption of luxury products. Many cities started to levy charges on household garbage and sewage water. In 2006, the central government started to tax the consumption of golf equipment, high-end watches, yachts, disposable chopsticks and hardwood floors (Li, 2006). In 2007, it modified its Law on Energy
Because of the global financial crisis, China’s GDP growth rate dropped below 10 per cent in 2008 (World Bank, 2016). The Chinese household consumption rate as a percentage of the GDP experienced consecutive decrease since 2000, reaching a low of 35.3 per cent in 2009 (World Bank, 2016). Government budget revenue declined as well, and there was a call for public institutions to tighten the belt (Liu, 2009). Given the economic climate, the Chinese official discourse on frugality continued but with less intensity. It compared foreign and Chinese practices, though different articles drew different conclusions. Some articles reported how foreign consumers embraced frugality as an opportunity during the financial crisis, linking frugality with a trendy, healthy, happy life. Some articles blamed excessive consumption and inadequate savings as the root cause of the global crisis and gleefully announced that the West was turning to traditional Chinese thoughts for solutions to its consumerist problems (Xu, 2009). Reporting on the rise of “share economy” in the USA, Shen (2012) noted that the traditional model of consumption-based economic growth became increasingly unsustainable.

It is true that the agenda “to build a resource-efficient, environment-friendly society” continued to underpin the discourse on frugality, but there was a clear effort to coordinate the frugality discourse with the pro-consumption discourse during the second half of the Hu administration. For example, in introducing the “new frugality” concept, Wang (2009) differentiated it from the traditional concept of frugality, which was necessitated by poverty: new frugality was not against consumption per se but against excessive extravagance and unrestrained spending. Extravagant consumption – especially those by government institutions and officials – remained the target of criticism because it helped breed corruption and escalate social conflict. Obvious dissonances between the two discourses inevitably emerged. For example, warning people that they should purchase what they could afford, Du (2011) declared that an era of luxury consumption was inevitable in China.

In explaining why consumer consumption was weak, most articles pointed to the widening income gaps, the rising costs of housing, education, health care and the low purchasing power of most Chinese, and many called on the government to increase people’s income. Indeed, the Chinese Government initiated measures to address these problems (Shambaugh, 2016). It also adopted short-term stimulus packages to grow the economy. For example, many local governments issued consumption coupons to its residents. Between 2009 and 2012, the central government launched an “Electronics Going to the Countryside (jiadian xiaxiang)” program, which allowed the manufacturers of electronics to take a 13 per cent subsidy for each unit sold to the rural population; however, the program allowed many small, inefficient producers with unpopular products delayed their exit out of the market (China Finance, 2013). Meanwhile, China issued a rule banning individuals in debt to consume expensive products (Bai, 2010).

In summary, the Hu administration realized the many severe problems and consequences of China’s post-Mao economic development. Built around the theme of a harmonious society and emphasizing resource efficiency and sustainability, the Chinese official discourse on frugality assumed an unprecedented vigor during the first half of the period. Compared to the past rhetoric, it was less political and more open and inclusive in its perspective. Notably, anti-corruption was still mentioned in the discourse but not an essential rationale for frugality. The discourse sustained through the second half of the period, even though a negative economic climate meant that it had to wrestle against the pro-consumption discourse for attention. In the end, the Chinese economy continued on the same path at a high growth rate. China became the world’s largest automobile market in 2009, the largest...
personal computer market and the second largest economy in 2010 (Fletcher, 2011; Monahan, 2011).

**Frugality and the Chinese dream: the period of 2013-2015**

When Xi Jinping assumed office in 2013, the Chinese GDP growth rate slowed to below 8 per cent, and the household consumption rate hovered around 36.2 per cent of the GDP (World Bank, 2016). China was facing a domestic financial crisis because of mounting debts and nonperforming loans, and increasing consumer spending became the key for the government to adjust its growth model (Shambaugh, 2016). Politically, the CCP’s legitimacy, which largely hinged upon its delivery of economic growth, was further undermined by worsening corruption, environmental pollution and social protests. Confronted with these problems, the Xi administration proposed the concept of “the Chinese dream” to appeal to Chinese nationalism, which aimed to build China into a rich country, a strong nation and a nation with happy people (Xi, 2013). In this context, a large-scale “Practice Frugality, Combat Wastefulness” (lixing jieyue, fandui langfei) campaign was launched between 2013 and 2015.

A primary target of the campaign was bureaucracy, corruption and wastefulness among public institutions and officials. Xi Jinping demanded that promoting frugality and combating wastefulness should a long-term, systematic project (Party Literature Research Center of the CCP, 2016). The central government issued eight rules to improve the governing style of officials, which prescribed that government officials get rid of bureaucratic pompousness and extravagance when performing their job functions (The Central Committee of The CCP, 2012). It issued *Regulations on Practicing Frugality, Combating Wastefulness by Party, Political and Administrative Institutions* in late 2013, providing multiple channels of supervision and varied administrative penalties (The State Council, 2013). The disciplinary arm of the CCP closely monitored the implementation of these rules: between 2013 and July 2014, it investigated 51,600 cases and punished 67,679 persons (China Discipline and Inspection Daily, 2014). China’s military branch was also involved in the campaign: with Xi’s approval, it issued *Rules on Practicing Frugality and Strengthening the Administration of Budgets and Funds* (Xu, 2013).

Another component of the campaign was focused on efficient usage of resources. For example, in promoting the 23rd national “land day” (tudi ri), Yu (2013) explained that the Chinese dream engendered a new model of urbanization and economic development, which was characterized by being “intensive, smart, green and low carbon” and which aimed to protect arable land and the interests of farmers and to prevent the excessive expansion of cities. Similarly, both energy security and environmental protection emerged as top concerns, and the best way to achieve such goals was through conservation – some Chinese experts considered GDP as a less important index to assess economic growth (Xiong, 2013a, p. 1).

The “Practice Frugality, Combat Wastefulness” campaign also targeted ordinary Chinese. In March 2014, the CCP issued its *Opinion on Practicing Frugality and Combating Food Waste* (The Central Committee of the CCP, 2014). In the same year, its The Propaganda Department of the CCP (2014) launched a national campaign to advocate the idea that “frugality breeds virtue” (jian yi yangde). The campaign’s declared goal was to promote frugality and conservation as a Chinese traditional virtue and a key socialist value and to create an intense atmosphere in the society for practicing frugality and rejecting wastefulness, with the ultimate goal of realizing the dream of revitalizing the Chinese nation. The Chinese media and administrative systems were fully mobilized to implement the Propaganda Department’s call. For example, the Ministry of Environmental Protection
(2014) issued “Breathe Together, Strive Together: Citizens’ Behavioral Guidelines,” which taught the Chinese to protect the environment and reduce pollution through personal actions. A major target of the campaign was children and young people. The Ministry of Education organized a national event to encourage the young to practice frugality and not to waste food, water and electricity (Liu and Zhang, 2013). Chinese universities were involved in the campaign through some annual national events under the theme of “Building Resource-Efficient Campuses.” The tactic of role models was also deployed during this campaign, though more systematically than in previous campaigns. The Propaganda Department of the CCP selected and promoted ten “Frugality Stars”: the list included individuals of diverse backgrounds and also a dining hall, a volunteer group, a middle school and a flea market (The People’s Daily, 2014).

Given the intensity of the frugality discourse during this period, marketing and consumption practices became the target of close scrutiny and, in some cases, administrative actions. For example, some local government prohibited restaurants to require a minimum spending amount by customers. The State Administration of Radio and Television (2013) banned advertisements that touted their products as good gifts for bosses and officials – on the ground that they promoted the wrong values and harmed morality. The government raised the sales tax on ultra-luxury cars (Xiong, 2013b).

Despite a slowing Chinese economy, the Xi administration was more careful and restrained in its promotion of consumer consumption as an economic engine. First of all, it denied that the anti-wastefulness campaign affects consumption growth; rather, as it argued, freed from competitive consumption, consumers would have more money to spend on recreational, cultural and educational products (Pan and Wang, 2013), a provincial-level official, argued that the Chinese should shift from conspicuous consumption to frugal consumption. Most articles celebrated “rational consumption” as the foundation of the Chinese economy. In comparison, conspicuous consumption was considered as promoting decadent social ethos, and the sales decline of the luxury market was praised as a good sign that the anti-corruption campaign was working (Zhao, 2013). In discussing new sectors to propel economic growth, the attention was frequently directed toward information services, financial services, e-commerce, tourism and entertainment.

In summary, the first three years of the Xi administration witnessed another centrally orchestrated national campaign to promote frugality and resource efficiency. Reflecting the larger landscape of rising social instability, political conservatism and nationalism, the campaign encompassed multiple objectives, with anti-corruption as a main focus. In promoting frugality as a virtue and by systematically involving children and youth in the campaign, it clearly undertook the ambitious goal of creating a new social ethos. What distinguishes this campaign from previous ones was that a slowing Chinese economy did not appear to diminish its intensity; rather, the government believed that low inflation rates created the right climate to carry out the campaign.

Discussion
This historical review demonstrates that a Chinese official discourse on frugality persisted between 1979 and 2015, even though during the same period, China transformed from a socialist economy of central planning and insufficient supply of consumer goods to a market economy of excessive supply and weak consumer demand. The intensity of this official discourse frequently vacillated, adjusting to both economic and political conditions of the time as part of the larger political-economic contestation between competing ideas and policies. Its repertoire of ideas gradually expanded, starting purely as a socialist value inherited from the Communist Revolution but later on absorbing elements from traditional
Chinese culture and Western thoughts, trends and movements, so that, today, frugality as a value in China came to straddle over multiple, sometimes conflicting, ideological traditions. Correspondingly, the language of the discourse also evolved over time, environmentalist terminology having largely replaced leftist Maoist diction of classes. Notably, the moral dimension of frugality embedded in traditional Chinese culture had been fully integrated into the discourse by the self-proclaimed socialist regime, which continuously cultivated a suspicion about the corrupting effect of material indulgence. Throughout the four periods, the West served as a reference point in the discourse, sometimes as a source of emulation and sometimes as a source of stark warning.

The evolution of the Chinese official discourse on frugality between 1979 and 2015 closely reflects the development of Chinese politics in several ways. As its legitimacy was constantly challenged because of a confluence of political, social and economic factors, the CCP actively updated its theory of Chinese socialism, putting forward concepts such as “the primary stage of socialism,” “socialist spiritual civilization,” “harmonious society” and “the Chinese dream,” to redefine its mission and reshape public perception. Frugality as a value was mobilized by these theories and concepts, which, in turn, provided new political platitudes to anchor the official frugality discourse and to subjugate it to the larger political agenda. Because corruption presented a perennial threat to the CCP’s legitimacy, the frugality discourse regularly targeted government officials. The ups and downs of Chinese political liberalization also left strong marks on the frugality discourse: political retrenchment and ideological campaigns gave a boost to the discourse, especially during the 1980s, while the period of political liberalization in the first half of 2000s witnessed more participation of NGOs in the discourse and a more global outlook in its argument. The top-down, authoritarian method of Chinese socialist political campaigns, which was established and perfected during the Mao period was mobilized to disperse the discourse nation-wide. The two large, centrally orchestrated anti-wastefulness campaigns during the Hu and Xi administration testify to the unchanging authoritarian nature of Chinese politics and the relentlessness of the Chinese propaganda system (Brady, 2010). On the other hand, as China became more open to the outside world over the years, more Western thoughts and ideas were introduced into the country, which helped diversify the repertoire of the frugality discourse. Finally, the official frugality discourse revealed a strong paternalistic, elitist bias: farmers, the self-employed and children were the frequent target of criticism, and the state felt the need to educate Chinese consumers on how to spend their own money. This paternalistic, elitist bias is a hallmark of Chinese dynasty politics (Pines, 2012), as well as socialist politics (Lin, 2006).

The fluctuations of China’s economic reform and development had dramatically affected the official frugality discourse as well. Ever since 1979, it had to compete with a pro-consumption discourse, making compromises and sometimes yielding to it. Before 1997, when supply could not fully meet consumer demand, inflationary pressure usually forced the government to retreat from economic reform and to intensify the frugality discourse as a tool to curb rising demand; when reforms advanced and inflation was under control, the frugality discourse was put on a back burner and a bold pro-consumption discourse dominated. After 1997, when the Chinese economy experienced slower growth because of external or internal crisis, the frugality discourse was sometimes suppressed by a louder pro-consumption discourse. Most important of all, the discourse did not directly tackle the biggest source of wastefulness in China – the inefficient state sector and excessive capital investment by the government (Shambaugh, 2016). As the CCP’s legitimacy largely hinged on its delivery of economic growth and better living standards, what was economic in China also became political
so that the economic dimension of the frugality discourse bore a strong political burden and exposed the regime’s “cynical pragmatism and opportunism as the sole source of its legitimacy” (Zhang, 2008, p. 29).

It is difficult to find statistics to assess the effectiveness of the official frugality discourse over the years, but we can draw some conclusions based on circumstantial evidence. It is apparent that as an anti-corruption tool, the discourse failed miserably; ever since the 1980s, the Chinese Government had been issuing rules and bans to prevent officials from wasting public funds on feasts, gifts and recreational travels – the language of those documents was almost identical – yet the phenomenon persisted and even worsened over the years. What was missing from the recipe was a transparent, effective system to monitor and control the disbursement of public funds, which would not be possible without drastic political reform. Hence, in terms of anti-corruption, moral persuasion in the form of a frugality discourse did not work. As an economic tool to regulate consumer demand, the frugality discourse did not appear to work well either: between 1985 and 1989, inflation kept rising despite an intensified frugality discourse; in the late 1990s, deflation and weak consumer demand persisted, even though the pro-consumption discourse instead of the frugality discourse permeated the Chinese media. In addition, when the frugality discourse was packaged in socialist political slogans and platitudes and delivered through a top-down, authoritarian approach, it became a strong suspect of party propaganda and automatically aroused resistance by the public who had been bombarded by the state propaganda machine on a daily basis. In this light, even if its arguments had merits, the very channel of the official frugality discourse diminished its persuasiveness.

On the other hand, it is plausible that the official frugality discourse could have produced some effects on Chinese society. First, in confronting rising consumerism in China, it kept alive an alternative ethos and opened up a public space for debate and reflection on what an ideal life should be about and in which direction China should advance. It also helped introduce many new concepts and ideas – especially an environmentalist perspective – to Chinese consciousness. Today, because of high housing, education, health care and retirement costs, many Chinese have to practice some degree of frugality out of pure economic necessity. In this context, the official frugality discourse helped create a moral climate that lends a spiritual support to ordinary people’s practice of frugality. The discourse may have also persuaded some of the younger generations, who grew up in material abundance, to live a frugal, simple life because of their environmental concerns. Frugality rooted in daily habits is hard to change even when the economic necessity is gone. The Chinese case may corroborate Shi’s (1985) remark that frugality and simple living can be an attainable ideal on an individual basis, which furnishes the indestructible vitality to a national program.

Overall, the frugality discourse was mobilized by the Chinese Government mostly as an expedient political and economic tool to iron out problems created by market forces and, more significantly, to preserve the Party rule (Saich, 1992). It was not motivated by a fundamental, deliberate rejection of the consumption-based model of economic development. Even though ever since the 1980s, there had been voices in the discourse warning that China should not follow the Western consumption model based on a resource-wasteful lifestyle of air-conditioned houses, personal cars and unrestrained consumption, such voices never prevailed in the policy-making process. As a result, the country fumbled and rumbled down exactly the same path that the West had taken in its development, resulting in severe environmental problems, sprawling cities, jammed streets, widening incomes gaps, social discontent and a stressed population with a heavily mortgaged future. Discussion on why those warning voices did not prevail is beyond the scope of this article, but the authoritarian nature of Chinese politics shouldered the primary blame: it did not allow free public debate.
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Table 1. A Summary of the Chinese official frugality discourse in context, 1979-2015
in policy-making (Lynch, 1999). As a result, Chinese policy-making was “unfocused and aimless” (Lynch, 1999, p. 224), reactive and short-term in nature and full of self-defeating contradictions and compromises.

Conclusion
The development of the official frugality discourse in contemporary China echoes the Western experience in several ways: it was constantly evolving in its adaptation to new historical contexts; it served as an instrument to maintain social stability; it was embedded in the discourse of morality and spirituality; it was promoted in conjunction with values such as hard work and diligence; it projected an ambivalent view of consumption-based economic growth; it incorporated the ideas of environmentalism; it revealed an elitist bias; and it contained inherent tensions between rhetoric and practice (Horowitz, 1992; Shi, 1985; Witkowski, 2010). However, the Chinese experience differed from the Western experience in some other aspects: the Chinese state served as a primary source of the discourse through a top-down, authoritarian approach rather than through grassroots-level agitation by non-state actors; the rhetoric closely reflected China’s evolving socialist ideology and Chinese traditional cultural elements; and rather than aiming to maintain class distinction, it strove to diminish the perceived social gaps and cement social harmony. The Chinese experience reminds us of its Asian neighbors, which integrated a frugality discourse into their political programs (Garon, 2006; Nelson, 2006), yet it is uniquely Chinese as it was ultimately shaped by China’s complex political, economic, social and cultural landscape in the past few decades.

The development of the official frugality discourse in China between 1979 and 2015 had been accompanied by a parallel development of a consumption society in the country. The Chinese case demonstrates that traditional values such as frugality and simple living, incompatible with a consumption society as they may appear to be, may be mobilized by political actors for varied economic and/or political purposes and consequently obtain a paradoxical co-existence with consumerist ethos in our modern society. The continued presence of such traditional values, in turn, helps reshape the discussion of macro-economic policies, as well as specific marketing practices and regulations. In this light, the evolution of traditional ideas and values provides a productive entry point into our understanding of marketing history.

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**Further reading**


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